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CHELLIE PINGREE  
CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES  
1<sup>ST</sup> DISTRICT, MAINE

January 17, 2023

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RELATED AGENCIES

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CONSERVATION AND FORESTRY

Secretary Jennifer Granholm  
U.S. Department of Energy  
1000 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, D.C. 20585

Chair Lina Khan  
Federal Trade Commission  
600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20580

Dear Secretary Granholm and Chair Khan:

I write to you today regarding possible disturbing manipulation by the fossil fuel industry. A January 11, 2023 article appearing in the New York Times reports that a propane industry trade association is bankrolling a multi-million dollar ad campaign by paying TV influencers to promote fossil fuel use and discourage the use of heat pumps and other clean energy sources.[1] As Mainers and Americans across the country increasingly rely on heat pumps to provide affordable, reliable heating and cooling options, this campaign could have a negative influence on the lives and wallets of countless households, as well as weaken our fight against the climate crisis.

The Times reports that the Propane Education and Research Council, or PERC, “has spent millions of dollars on ‘provocative anti-electrification messaging’ for TV, print and social media, using influencers” on outlets including HGTV, a subsidiary of Warner Brothers Discovery Inc. One such influencer, HGTV host Matt Blashaw, used his platform to promote “propane day” where he misleadingly claimed that using propane for heating works better than heat pumps. At no point during or after the segment did Mr. Blashaw disclose that he was being paid by the propane industry. According to the NY Times, PERC intends to spend \$13 million on its anti-clean energy campaign this year alone.

This disingenuous campaign has dire consequences for states like mine. Mainers face long, rough winters where cost-effective heating is essential. More Mainers use heating oil to warm their homes than any other state, with close to 80% of Mainers’ heating powered by fossil fuels. Our state has turned this high energy burden into an opportunity to lead a statewide transition to cleaner, more efficient, and cost-effective heat pumps. By one estimate, in Maine it costs approximately \$2,870 per year to run a heat pump. By comparison, the tab is \$4,460 per year to finance a propane furnace – almost double the rate of a heat pump. Starting in 2019, Maine has set an aggressive goal to install 100,000 new heat pumps by 2025 as part of its ambitious Climate Action Plan, and is well on its way with over 82,000 pumps installed at the end of 2022 [2], but misinformation campaigns like those led by PERC could dissuade consumers from making the switch, moving us further away from our climate commitments.

As you know well, curbing fossil fuel emissions is essential to meeting the growing challenge of climate change. To that end, the landmark Inflation Reduction Act enacted by Congress last year made the largest investments to fight climate change in U.S. history. Importantly, this legislation prioritized alternative energy sources, creating new rebates of up to \$8,000 for low-and-moderate-income households to buy heat pumps and expanding tax credits for renewable energy investments including solar panels and heat pumps.[3]

I am concerned that PERC, as a federally sanctioned trade association, is in violation of the Propane Education and Research Act of 1996, which requires that the funds PERC spends on marketing be used for research, education, training, and safety activities. I respectfully request the Department of Energy (DOE) use its oversight authority under this Act to ensure the activities PERC is engaged in are consistent with the law. DOE can do more to curb these abuses by propane—and possibly other—trade groups, as well as investigate the findings of this report and take all appropriate action. Further, I would urge the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) to investigate whether this activity meets the standards set by statute and guidance concerning endorsements and testimonials.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I stand ready to work with you to protect consumers in Maine and across the country.

Sincerely,



Chellie Pingree  
Member of Congress

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[1] <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/01/11/climate/climate-propane-influence-campaign.html>

[2] [https://www.maine.gov/climateplan/sites/maine.gov.climateplan/files/inline-files/MWW\\_Climate%20Plan%20Update%20December%202022\\_digital.pdf](https://www.maine.gov/climateplan/sites/maine.gov.climateplan/files/inline-files/MWW_Climate%20Plan%20Update%20December%202022_digital.pdf)

[3] <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/09/13/climate/climate-law-tax-credits.html>